

FOUR PLAYS

GILBERT CANNAN

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FOUR PLAYS



**FOUR PLAYS BY GILBERT
CANNAN: JAMES AND JOHN
— MILES DIXON — MARY'S
WEDDING — A SHORT WAY
WITH AUTHORS**

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TO
IRENE ROOKE
AND
MILTON ROSMER

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JAMES AND JOHN

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

JOHN BETTS	.	.	Mr. H. R. Hignett.
JAMES BETTS	.	.	Mr. Fisher White.
MRS. BETTS	.	.	Miss Helen Haye.
MR. BETTS	.	.	Mr. James Hearn.

SCENE : *Their parlour.*

Produced at the Haymarket Theatre,
March 1910.

JAMES AND JOHN

It is half-past nine of an evening and the scene is the parlour of a little house in a gaunt row of houses in a street in a London suburb. By the fireplace at the back JAMES and JOHN BETTS are playing backgammon, the board on a little table between them. They are both grey. JAMES has a beard. JOHN is clean-shaven. JOHN wears glasses. Both wear morning-coats and both have carpet slippers. JAMES smokes, JOHN does not. JOHN has a glass of whisky on the mantelpiece within reach: JAMES is teetotal. They are absorbed in their game and pay no attention to their mother, a stout old lady who is sitting in her chair reading a novel, sleeping, and knitting. Her chair is by another little table on which the solitary lamp of the room is placed so as to cast its light on her book. She is directly in front of the fire so that her back is towards the audience. JOHN is sitting with his back towards her.

The room is ugly and Mid-Victorian. Its door is to the right. Its window to the left. In the window is a stand of miserable-looking ferns and an india-rubber plant.

JOHN [triumphantly]. I take you there and there . . .

JAMES. We shall see. [*Silence.*]

MRS. BETTS. Did you say it was raining when you came in, John?

JOHN [*turning irritably*]. I have said so four times.

[*Silence. They devote themselves to their game again.*]

MRS. BETTS [*plaintively, as though she knew full well that her remarks would fall on deaf ears. She lays down her book*]. This isn't a very interesting book. . . . I don't think books are so interesting as they used to be . . . they all seem to be trying to be like real life. . . . I must say I like to know who marries who . . . and I don't like stories about married life. . . . I suppose the authors must be thinking of their own. . . . Depressing. . . . You haven't said how you like my new cap, Jamie. . . .

JAMES [*looking up, abruptly*]. Very nice. I think I shall gammon you, John.

JOHN. H'm.

[*He rattles the dice furiously, seeing the game go against him.*]

MRS. BETTS. You did say it was raining, John?

[*No answer—only a frenzied rattle of the dice.*]

I don't think anything has happened. . . . The next-door people have had trouble with the servant again. . . . A thief this one. . . . I wonder if it is raining. . . . I wouldn't like it to be wet for him. . . .

[JAMES and JOHN look at each other and JAMES looks over at his mother. She is fumbling for her handkerchief.]

JOHN. Gammon. . . .

[*He rises and looks down at his brother in triumph. Each takes a little note-book from his pocket and makes a note of the game.*

JAMES. I still lead by two hundred and twenty-three games. . . .

[*MRS. BETTS is wiping her eyes and snuffling.*

JOHN goes to her and pats her shoulder kindly.

JOHN. Would you like a game, mamma ? . . .

MRS. BETTS. No—no-o-o . . . I couldn't—not to-night. . . .

JAMES. I thought we had agreed not to talk of it nor to think of it. . . .

MRS. BETTS. It—it is all very well for you boys to talk . . . b-b-but . . . I can't help but remember . . . all these years . . .

JOHN. Shall Jamie read to you, mamma ?

MRS. BETTS. It—it was so—so dreadful . . .

JAMES. Yes, yes, mamma. . . . But we agreed that we would . . .

MRS. BETTS. It all comes back to me so. . . . The whole thing. . . . I suppose they never talk of it at the bank now, Jamie . . . ?

JAMES [*exploding*]. I wish to God he had never lived to come back again . . .

JOHN. Tssh !—Tssh ! . . .

JAMES. I say that he has ruined mamma's life, and your life and mine. . . . I say again that I wish to God he had never lived to come back. . . .

JOHN. Think of mamma. . . .

MRS. BETTS. Your own father . . . [*She weeps.*

JAMES. It is against my wish that he is allowed to come here at all. . . .

JOHN. Do let us try to forget the whole affair until . . . until he comes. . . . Don't you think it would be better if you went to bed, mamma ?

[JAMES *has fallen to pacing up and down the room.*

MRS. BETTS. No ; I must stay . . . to . . . to see him . . .

JOHN. You must be brave, then . . .

MRS. BETTS [*making an effort and gulping down her sobs*]. Ye-yes. . . . [*She takes JOHN'S hand and pats it, while she anxiously tries to watch JAMES in his pacing.*] But, John . . . I'm afraid —afraid of Jamie. . . .

[*She says this almost in a whisper but JAMES hears her. He stops by the fireplace and stands with his back to the fire and glares at his mother.*

JAMES. I am, I hope, a just man . . .

JOHN. We have argued enough. . . . We must wait. . . . We can't have mamma breaking down before he comes. . . .

JAMES. John, you're a soft fool. . . . This man has done us all an injury. . . . He has brought misery upon this house. . . . He has no other place to which to turn : for a while he may rest under our roof. . . . Is that understood ?

JOHN. Quite. . . . Can't you leave it alone ?

JAMES. I wish to make myself clearly understood . . .

JOHN. I think we both understand you . . . and you need not speak so loud.

JAMES. There must be no sentiment and he must be made to understand the terms on which I have consented to receive him. . . .

MRS. BETTS. We—we must be kind, Jamie—we must be kind. . . . He was always a kind man . . .

JAMES. Kind! . . . To treat you in the way he did—and you can call him kind. Oh! the foolishness of women. . . .

MRS. BETTS. He was never a bad man. . . . Is it raining, John?

[JOHN goes to the window and peeps out.

JOHN. Yes, mamma, it is raining.

MRS. BETTS. Oh! . . . It isn't too late for one of you to meet him at the station . . . is it?

JAMES. You know that that is impossible. . . . It is enough that he is permitted to come here at all. . . . It is my house. . . . The ordering of this affair is in my hands. . . . Let it be . . .

MRS. BETTS. He has been punished enough for his sin. . . .

JAMES. *We* have been punished. *I* have been punished. . . . Year after year I have been passed over and men younger than myself have been promoted. . . . For years I was made to feel that my continued presence in the bank was an act of charity. . . . For years I have felt rather than heard the miserable story whispered to every raw lad who came to the place . . . and suffered . . . because my father betrayed his trust. . . . And you say he was not a bad man . . .

JOHN. Jamie—Jamie—

[MRS. BETTS *beats feebly with her hands against him.*

JAMES. Jamie!—Jamie!—Well enough for you, John—you were out of it. . . .

[JOHN *folds his arms as though he realised the hopelessness of endeavouring to stem the stream of his brother's indignation, and to indicate that he also has suffered but is too much a man to talk about it. This goads JAMES only to further indignation. JOHN mutters unintelligibly.*

JAMES. What do you say? What do you say?

JOHN. I said that what's done is done and let the past bury its dead.

JAMES. It is not dead. . . .

MRS. BETTS. Don't quarrel—don't quarrel. I cannot bear it. . . .

JAMES. Mother, we must understand each other—you, John and I—we must see this thing as it is. . . . Set aside the fact that this man is our father and your husband. . . . We must see what he did coldly, dispassionately, and judge accordingly.

JOHN. I read in a book that no man has the right to judge another man . . .

JAMES. Facts are facts. . . .

JOHN. We don't know what drove him to do what he did. . . .

JAMES. We know—what we know. We know the injury that he has done to ourselves. We know that because our father—because our father . . . [MRS. BETTS *now has her face in her handkerchief*; JAMES *is for a moment stopped but stiffens*

himself] because our father robbed the clients of the branch of which he was manager in order to keep the women whom he had bought . . .

JOHN. You . . . [JAMES *raises his hand*.

JAMES. I will end where I have begun. . . . It is true that he was revered as an upright gentleman, that he gave large sums in charity, that he did much good for the poor of this district, that he did this, that, and the other thing which kept him conspicuous as a righteous man. . . . We know that he was an excellent man of business and that the directors gave him the opportunity to escape. . . . There is that to his credit that he had the courage to face the consequences of his actions. . . . But even in that he had no thought for us, to whom rather than to himself his thoughts should have turned. . . . We know only too well the shame and disgrace of the arrest, the infamous revelations, the position irretrievably lost. . . . We know—you and I, John—we know the ruin that it has been to us. . . . We have seen other men of our own age fulfil their lives . . .

JOHN. Will you cease?—

JAMES. We know that we have been chained here, you and I, to rot and rot . . . men wasted . . . without pride of home or pride of work. . . . We have sat here year in, year out, waiting, waiting . . . for nothing . . . knowing that nothing could ever come to us . . .

MRS. BETTS. O-o-oh. . . .

JAMES. We have suffered enough, I say, and if now that he has served his punishment and is free we take him under our roof again, to live

here in this town, with us whom he has so—has so—so wrecked, in this town where he is still infamous . . . then that which is only now whispered of us will be common talk. . . . We shall be lower than we have ever been and lose all that we have. . . . That is all.

[He takes a pipe from his pocket, fills it with tobacco, lights it, and stalks out of the room.]

MRS. BETTS sobs quietly for a little.

MRS. BETTS. John, dear—John . . .

JOHN *[without moving]*. Yes, mother?

MRS. BETTS. He was never a bad man.

JOHN. No . . . mother.

MRS. BETTS. It must have been bitter for Jamie . . .

JOHN. Yes, mother, it has not been . . . easy.

MRS. BETTS. He was always a kind man . . . always. . . . I don't understand—I never shall understand what made him do . . . do . . . what he did. . . . He . . . he used to be so fond of children. . . . You don't think hardly of him, John . . . ?

JOHN. Not—not for a long time now, mother.

MRS. BETTS. I never shall understand what made him do . . . because—because he—he never really turned from me . . . I should have known if—if he had done that. . . . Do you understand, John?

JOHN. I am trying, mother—

MRS. BETTS. He was sometimes impatient with me . . . and . . . and I was a foolish woman. . . . Such a clever man he was. . . . But he never turned from me . . .

JOHN. No—

MRS. BETTS. I remember now . . . often . . . when he told me. . . . How kind he was . . . and gentle. . . . He had been ill and worried for a long time, and then one day he came home and sat without a word all through the evening. . . . It was raining then. . . . About ten o'clock . . . [JOHN *is sitting with his head in his hands on the sofa between the fire and the window*] about ten o'clock . . . he came and kissed me, and told me to go to bed. Then he went out. . . . I do not know where he went, but he came back wet through, covered with mud, and his coat was all torn. . . . I was awake when he came back, but he spoke no word to me. . . . He came to bed and lay trembling and cold. . . . I took his hand. . . . He shook and he was very cold. . . . He—he turned to me like a child and sobbed, sobbed. . . . Then, dear, he told me what he had done. . . . He told me that . . . that he had tried—tried to do away with himself . . . and—and could not. . . . He never asked me to forgive him. . . . He told me how the directors had asked him to go away to avoid prosecution. . . . He said that he must bear his punishment. . . . He is not a bad man, John. . . . Men and women are such strange creatures . . . there is never any knowing what they will do . . .

JOHN. You want him to come back, mother ?

MRS. BETTS. Why, yes. . . . Where else should he go ? . . .

JOHN. You know, mother . . . Jamie wanted to be married . . .

MRS. BETTS. Oh ! yes—yes—yes. . . . Poor boy. . . .

JOHN. We're men. It has been a long time. We're old men . . . now . . .

[JOHN mends the fire and takes his whisky and soda.

MRS. BETTS. John, dear . . . [JOHN turns from poking the fire] I would like him to have his old chair that he used to sit in . . . and his old slippers . . . and there's an old pipe that he had—in my room . . . you know . . .

JOHN. Very well. . . .

[JOHN goes out. MRS. BETTS sniffs and dries her eyes. She takes up her book, reads it for a little, then lays it down, takes her knitting, plies her needles for a little, then lays that down. She fixes her spectacles and looks anxiously at the clock on the mantelpiece. It has an aggressively loud tick. Then she looks towards the window and, rising slowly to her feet, shuffles across and looks out. JAMES returns and finds her there.

JAMES [sternly]. I think you should sit quietly and calm yourself.

MRS. BETTS [meekly]. Yes, Jamie.

[She shuffles back to her chair.

JAMES. Would you like me to read to you ?

MRS. BETTS. Please, Jamie.

[JAMES goes to the little dwarf bookcase in the recess by the fireplace and takes down a book. He moves the table with the backgammon board, and draws up his chair to the right side of the fireplace, and then sits so as to have the light of the lamp on his book.

JAMES [*reading*—" *Pickwick*," Chap. *xxvii.*].
"There is a repose about Lant Street, in the Borough, which sheds a gentle melancholy upon the soul. There are always a good many houses to let in the street ;——"

MRS. BETTS. Like our street.

JAMES. "It is a by-street and its dulness is soothing. A house in Lant Street would not come within the denomination of a first-rate residence, in the strict acceptation of the term ; but it is a most desirable spot nevertheless. If a man wished to abstract himself from the world—to remove himself from within reach of temptation—to place himself beyond the possibility of any inducement to look out of the window—he should by all means go to Lant Street.

"Mr. Bob Sawyer embellished one side of the fire in his first-floor front, early on the evening for which he had invited Mr. Pickwick : and Mr. Ben Allen the other. The preparations for the visitors appeared to be completed. The umbrellas in the passage had been heaped into a little corner outside the best parlour door, the bonnet and shawl of the landlady's servant had been removed from the bannisters : there were not more than two pairs of pattens on the street door mat, and a kitchen candle, with a very long snuff, burnt cheerfully on the ledge of the staircase window. ——" Are you listening ?

MRS. BETTS. Yes, dear.

JAMES. "Mr. Bob Sawyer had himself purchased the spirits at a wine vaults in High Street and had returned home preceeding the bearer thereof, to preclude the possibility of their

delivery at the wrong house. The punch was ready made in a saucepan in the bedroom :——”

[The door is thrown open and JOHN comes staggering in with a great chair which he places on the left side of the fireplace. He takes a pair of red leather slippers from his pockets and places them in front of the fire to warm. From another pocket he produces a pipe and an old tin of tobacco and lays them on the mantelpiece. JAMES stops in his reading and scowls. The old lady starts up in her seat and watches JOHN'S movements intently. JOHN takes not the slightest notice of JAMES but goes out of the room again. JAMES opens his mouth to speak but decides to go on reading as though nothing had happened.]

JAMES. “Notwithstanding the highly satisfactory nature of all these arrangements, there was a cloud on the countenance of Mr. Bob Sawyer as he sat by the fireside. There was a sympathising expression too in the features of Mr. Ben Allen, as he gazed intently on the coals : and a tone of melancholy in his voice as he said, after a long silence :

“ ‘Well, it is unlucky that she should have taken it into her head to turn sour, just on this occasion. She might at least have waited till to-morrow.’ ”

[JOHN returns with a glass, a decanter of whisky, and a jug of water. These he places on the table by his mother's side. She looks up at him gratefully. JOHN, a little ostentatiously, takes a book and sits on the sofa.]

JAMES shuts "*Pickwick*" and remains gazing into the fire. They sit in silence for some time.

MRS. BETTS. Is the clock right, John ?

JOHN [*looking at his watch*]. A little fast. . . . I told Jane she might go to bed. I thought it better.

MRS. BETTS. Yes——

[JOHN is conscious that JAMES is scrutinising him narrowly, and becomes a little uneasy. He sits so that the chair he has brought is between himself and his brother. He can see his mother from this position. They sit again in silence for some time.]

MRS. BETTS. There was a funeral in the street to-day. Quite a grand affair. . . . [*Silence.*] There have been quite a number of deaths in the district lately. . . . [*Silence.*] They go on having babies, though . . . I wonder why . . . [*Silence.*] I suppose everything happens for the best. . . . [*Her prattle becomes intolerable to JAMES, who springs to his feet and walks furiously up and down the room. He subsides finally, having scared her into silence, and they sit mum while the aggressive clock tick-ticks, and faint noises from the street come into the room—the sound of wheels on cobble-stones, of whistling boys, of a street-brawl. Then comes the boom of a great distant clock striking ten.*] That's the Town Hall. When you hear it so clearly as that it means rain. . . .

[*Silence again. The bell of the house is heard to tinkle. JOHN leaps to his feet and goes from the room. MRS. BETTS starts up trembling and fearful. JAMES sits bolt*

upright and stern in his chair. They both turn and watch the door. JOHN returns alone.

JOHN. Only the post.

JAMES. Anything for me ?

JOHN. No ; for me. . . .

[He reads his letter and throws it in the fire.

JAMES and MRS. BETTS subside into their former attitudes. JOHN returns to the sofa and takes up his book again.

MRS. BETTS. Who was it from, John ?

JOHN. It was nothing of any consequence.

[They relapse into silence.

JAMES. It is past your bed-time, mother.

[MRS. BETTS takes no notice.] It is past ten o'clock, mother. . . .

MRS. BETTS. I know. . . . *[They are silent again. JAMES falls to plucking his beard, and MRS. BETTS to watching him.]* How like you are to your father, James ! . . . I suppose that is why you could never get on together. . . .

[JAMES winces, but ignores the remark.

JOHN. I think, mother, if we agreed not to talk it would be easier for all of us. . . .

MRS. BETTS. Very well, John . . . only—I—I couldn't bear the silence. . . .

[JAMES opens "Pickwick" again and pretends to be absorbed.

JOHN. If you would read, Jamie . . .

JAMES. She does not listen . . . *[MRS. BETTS has caught the sound of something outside the house. She turns and looks, half in fear, half in eagerness, towards the window. She lifts her hand and seems to point in that direction. The house bell is heard again. JOHN looks up, sees her agitation, and*

comes to soothe her. *He moves towards the door, and has reached it when JAMES shakes himself and holds up a hand.*] Stop! [*JOHN turns.*] I will go.

JOHN. I beg your pardon. I will go.

[*He opens the door and goes out.* JAMES assumes a commanding attitude by the fireplace. MRS. BETTS turns and watches the door. She hears murmurs of voices, and, rising to her feet, begins to shuffle towards the door.

JAMES [*without looking at her ; in a firm, quiet voice*]. Mother—sit down. [*He never takes his eyes from the door.* MRS. BETTS stands turning pitcously between his command and her instinctive inclination. Then slowly she returns and subsides into her chair, but never takes her eyes from the door.

MRS. BETTS begins to whimper.] Tssh! Tssh!

[*The door slowly opens and JOHN comes in, grave, solemn. He holds the door open and presently MR. BETTS comes in. He is a big man, but a broken and a wretched ; and yet there is a fine dignity in him. He stands by the door for some moments, his eyes fixed on his wife. He comes towards her slowly as though he were afraid, were not sure ; that breaks in him, and he stumbles towards her and kisses her.*

BETTS. Wife . . .

[*She breaks into a little moaning cry, fondles and kisses his hand. JOHN comes and stands behind them. MR. BETTS turns from his wife to JAMES and holds out his hand. JAMES bows stiffly, and for a moment there is silence. The old antagonism leaps in both.*

JAMES [*with stiff dignity*]. You are welcome, sir. . . .

[MR. BETTS stretches to his full height and bows with a dignity no less stiff than that of his son. JAMES stands cold, while the other three are grouped together. MRS. BETTS tugs at her husband's hand.

MRS. BETTS. Your chair, dear . . . John brought it down for you. . . .

[MR. BETTS moves and sits in the chair by the fireplace. JAMES waits for a little and then, without a word, sits in his chair. JOHN brings up a chair and sits between his mother and father, nearer to his mother. They sit so in awkward silence, during which MR. BETTS turns his eyes from one to another of his family. JAMES alone does not look at his father, but studiously away from him. JOHN turns and mixes a glass of whisky and water for his father. This the old man takes gladly. He is reminded that he is cold by this attention, and shivers. He holds out a hand towards the blazing fire, then finds JAMES looking at it vindictively and withdraws it hastily.

JOHN. Your slippers are there. . . . [MR. BETTS takes off his boots and gives them to JOHN, who takes them out of the room.] Will you . . . smoke?

MR. BETTS. Thank you. [*He takes his old pipe and tobacco and lights, looking at JAMES the while. He blows out a cloud of smoke gratefully. He thrusts out a leg towards the fire.*] The value of tobacco is best appreciated when it is the last you possess and there is no chance of getting more. . . . Bismarck said that . . .

MRS. BETTS [*who has been weeping quietly*]. I think—I think I must go to—to bed. [*She rises to her feet and shuffles slowly over to her husband. She bends over him and kisses him, and with her weak old hands pats his cheek.*] I—I hope you are not wet, dear. . . . It must be raining terribly. . . .

[*She shuffles over to JAMES, kisses him, and JOHN sees her to the door, then comes back and sits in her chair. MR. BETTS has watched his wife with burning eyes as she moved.*

MR. BETTS. How long? How long?

JAMES [*icily*]. It is six months since she was out of doors. . . . It is almost six years since she has been well enough to stay away from . . . from home. . . .

[MR. BETTS *draws the back of his hand over his eyes.*

JOHN. Be just, James, be just.

JAMES [*in the same hard monotone*]. It is twelve years since we came to this house in this melancholy street. . . . In this room she has sat, day in, day out, year in, year out. . . . Day by day we have set out, I for the bank, John there for his office. . . . Year by year we have known that there was nothing to be done . . . that we must sacrifice everything to her. . . . We have known that. . . . We have known that we could bring her nothing, that she could bring us nothing. . . . There she sat . . .

[MR. BETTS *sits with bowed head, offering no protest.*

JOHN. Be just, James, be just. . . . She has been waiting for this day . . .

JAMES [*ignoring him*]. We have known that

such an existence was futile . . . sterile. . . .
We have all been . . . prisoners.

JOHN. Shame on you . . .

JAMES. I have told you in my letter the terms
on which I bid you welcome to my house. . . .
What have you to say ?

[MR. BETTS looks at JOHN, then to JAMES.

*Their eyes meet and for a moment they are
man to man, enmity between them, the man
judging and the man being judged. A little
nervous laugh escapes from MR. BETTS.
He puts up his hand to the place where his
wife kissed him and caressed his face, and
his eyes follow her slow path to the door.
He shrugs, seems to shrink. He flings up
his hands.*

MR. BETTS. Nothing. . . . There is nothing
to say. . . . We are all so . . . so old . . .

*[There is a silence. The clock ticks more
wickedly than ever. JAMES and JOHN sit
with bowed heads.*

JOHN [*to his father*]. Shall I show you your
room ?

MR. BETTS. Thank you, John.

[JAMES rises, goes to the door and opens it.
As JOHN and MR. BETTS reach the door,
JAMES holds out his hand to his father.

JAMES. Good night—father.

MR. BETTS. Good night, James.

[JOHN and MR. BETTS go out. JAMES puts out
the light and follows.

CURTAIN

MILES DIXON

CHARACTERS

JOHN BAISBROWN . Mr. Herbert Lomas.
ELLEN BAISBROWN . Miss Irene Rooke.
MILES DIXON . Mr. Milton Rosmer.
JAN BAISBROWN . Mr. Frank Darch.
JANIE BAISBROWN . Miss Hilda Bruce Potter.

ACT. I. *The Yard of Brimmerhead Farm at night.*
ACT II. *The Kitchen of Brimmerhead Farm.*

Twenty years elapse between the two Acts.

Produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester,
November 1910.

MILES DIXON

ACT I

The scene is the yard of a farm. A rough wall at the right is broken by a gateway leading into a field, across the brow of which the top of a church tower is seen, and above this is the line of the fells. At the left is a little low house, two storied, with a third room built on to it, approached by a rough outside staircase. It is a wild night and very dark. In the window of the little room a light shines. The window is thrown open and the head of a woman is shown for a moment before the light is extinguished. The window is shut and the key of the door is turned in the lock.

There is silence for some time, and the white walls of the little house loom mistily through the darkness. . . . Presently a man comes through the gateway, floundering in the muck of the yard, and gropes his way up the staircase. He tries the door, and curses when he finds it locked. He knocks and knocks again. Then he comes down, strikes a match to look for pebbles on the ground, and the light is for that moment shown on his face. It is a dark, striking face, with the eyes too close together, the lips a little too thin, the jaw a little too long and narrow, and the nose not quite long

enough. He gropes about and picks up some pebbles, which he throws at the window of the little house, then waits. He stands muttering and cursing. He throws pebbles again at the window and looks round in the direction of the farmhouse. Over on the other side of the valley a light shines and then is gone. The clock in the church tower strikes one.

MILES. One . . .

[He throws pebbles again and stands cursing. The window is pushed open and the woman appears.]

ELLEN. Why must you come on this wild night?

MILES. 'Tis t' wild night that t' crazy man is craziest and t' thing that calls to 'im calls longest and loudest.

ELLEN. And you'll not be content?

MILES. I'll never be content. . . . To sleep cold and lonely out on t' fells, wet and cold under a wall or wet and cold in a ditch, wi' t' scent o' yer 'air and t' touch o' ye in my mind for all t' warmth that I 'ave. . . . By God! . . . 'Twas a bad night for me when I furst coom to ye.

ELLEN. And a bad night for me that ever I was false to my man and give myself to a wild tramp the likes o' you. . . .

MILES. Ha' done. . . . I've that to tell you that I cannot stand bawling and crying for t' folk in t' big 'ouse to 'ear.

ELLEN. 'Tis late and you'd best be going away. . . . I left t' light for ye 'till I thought ye never was coming. T' beasts are asleep and

t'childer are asleep and t' town folks int' house are asleep. . . . Ye'd best be goin' away.

MILES. And where will I sleep?

ELLEN. Where ye've slept these years since the curse came on ye and there was never a 'ouse int' dale would let ye bide in it. . . . Ye'd best be goin', for I must be early stirrin' and there's no knowin' . . .

MILES. And where will I sleep, I say?

ELLEN. Where ye've slept these long years since yer ain kin turned from ye . . . wet and cold, as ye say, under a wall, or wet and cold in a ditch, or crept to a byre for warmth or curled up in t' 'ay in a barn, to steal away in t' dawn like t' wild lone thing that ye are. . . . It were best ye'd drowned yerself in t' beek before ever ye coom creepin' round wi' yer light love words and yer talk o' stars and yer creepin' soft ways that brought me to t' madness that was in me. . . .

MILES. Let me in to ye.

ELLEN. Ye'd best be goin' for t' bad thing that ye are and t' light thing ye've made me be. . . . Ye're t' waste o' t' world ye are, and I'll never a word from ye. . . .

MILES. I've a mind to go from t' fells. I've a mind to sleep no more on t' fells but to go where there's lights an' warm 'ouses, where there's rich folk and gay folk and folk that 'ave never a care in t' world for t' strong 'ouses they live in and t' soft raiment they wear and t' pretty gems and t' gold things and their pockets full and full o' money, and their cellars all filled wi' bags o' gold. . . . I've a mind to go where

there's never a 'ill and love words is as easy as scything thistles and light as thistledown on t' air. I've a mind to leave ye for t' drab that ye are and go where t' scent o' yer 'air will 'aunt me no more, and I'll clean forget t' touch o' ye, and clean forget t' bad day when I took ye and lost my peace and t' light 'cart that I 'ad. I've a mind to go as other men 'ave gone to make a fortin' and a great name, and not to stay where t' name o' me stinks and is a whispered thing, though there was never a 'armful thing that I did.

ELLEN. An' if ye will not make yer fortin', and if in all t' world yer name stinks and is whispered for an un'o'ly thing?

MILES. Then I'll go to t' sea and swim out into it 'till I can swim no more . . . and I'll stand wi' t' other dead men at bottom o' t' sea and talk to 'em o' t' rottenness o' women, for 'tis all o' that that dead men talk.

ELLEN. And 'tis o' t' cruelty and savagery and great beastliness o' men that dead women tell, and 'tis you'll be in t' mouths o' all on us for t' worst beast o' them all and for t' black 'ate that ye brought into t' 'earts o' us, that 'ad never a true word on your lips nor a true thought in your 'ead nor a true beat o' t' 'eart for a one of us. . . . An' what was given ye gladly ye spoiled in t' takin'. . . . You to talk o' losin' your peace and t' lightness o' 'eart that ye 'ad! . . . When ye come lightly and ye go lightly and 'tis all to ye like eatin' till ye be full or drinkin' till there's no thirst left in ye . . . and not one o' us is more to ye than another. . . .

MILES. Ye lie an' ye lie an' ye know that ye lie, for there's none but you . . .

ELLEN. 'Ere. . . . But ower t' fells there's this and that and t'other one, an' always a new one comin' up t' road and you leapin' down t' fells to meet 'er.

MILES. 'Tis another world ower t' fells and me another man that ye take no count on and never will know.

ELLEN. And that's t' badness in ye. . . . Ye'd best be goin'.

MILES. And if I go 'twill be never to come to ye again . . . and me come down fro' t' fells to tell ye that I was goin' out into t' world away fro' t' fells and t' madness in 'em and to say would ye come wi' me to keep t' wind o' t' fells beatin' in my face and to keep t' sights and scents and sounds wi' me in all t' places where we may come. . . .

ELLEN. For t' likes o' you to leave my man and t' fine 'ouse 'e gives me and t' childer and go out wi' ye, wi' never a stick nor stock between us, and never a 'ouse to live in and wander ower t' cold world. . . . Fine under t' stars on summer nights. . . . Oh, ye'd best be goin'. . . .

MILES. And you that put t' light in yer window for to tell me yer man was gone to t' town, ye're now for tellin' me to be gone ?

ELLEN. 'Twas to tell ye that that I brought ye 'ere wi' t' light i' my window. . . . I've a mind to get back to t' woman that I was and forget that ever you coom slinkin' to destroy t' good life that I 'ad.

MILES. And ye'll not let me go so lightly wi' never a kiss o' yer lips an' never a touch o' yer 'ands.

ELLEN. Ye came lightly and lightly ye can go, and I'll not 'ave a kiss o' yer lips and I'll forget that ever there was such a thing as you. . . .

[Miles has been standing immediately under the window, and they have been up to now talking in low voices so as not to be heard in the house on the other side of the yard. Miles springs back now and raises his voice.]

MILES. Then I'll not go till all t' folk in t' dale know ye for t' woman that ye are, for t' rotten, lying thing that ye are; an' 'tis you, when I'm striding ower t' world, 'll be out there on t' fells, sleepin' wet and cold under a wall or wet and cold in a ditch an' alone . . . an' me stridin' ower t' world. . . . An' ye'll never forget. . . .

ELLEN. Go. *[She shuts the window.]*

MILES. Huh! . . . Ye trull. . . . And you, when yer man's in t' town, to set light to draw t' likes o' me to beat like a moth again t' panes o' yer window, and would draw me into t' flames 'till my wings be scorched and me fall broken to t' ground. . . . I'll come to ye. . . .

[He runs up the stairs and tries the latch, but finds it fast. He shakes the door furiously. His tone changes.]

MILES. 'Tis foolishness that I said. . . . D' ye 'ear? 'Tis foolishness an' all that cooms fro' sittin' alone on t' fells wi' t' thoughts in me windin' about and about, and never a thought

but comes back to you and t' wonder o' you. [*He listens.*] For there was never t' like o' you since t' world began, and you t' lovely mate for me, that, for all that my name stinks and is a whispered thing, am a larger man and a freer man and a braver man and a properer man than any that goes sellin' theirselves for t' little livin' they need, an' toilin' and moilin' like slaves for t' small livin' that is all that t' masters 'll give em up yon int' quarry and down yon in t' fields. . . . [*He listens.*] D' ye 'ear ? 'Tis foolishness that I said and all that cooms to a man fro' t' great misery o' lovin' a woman that 'e canna take and show to t' world for t' wonderful mate that she is. . . . 'Tis foolishness that I said for t' black jealousy that comes ower me in t' long hours when I sit out yon and think o' you livin' along o' t' fools that 'ave never an eye for t' sights o' t' world and never an ear for t' sounds . . . and so thiek and muddy as they are, can keep and 'old ye when ye should be wi' me, lovin' me and t' world so's ye can 'ardly bear it. . . . [*He listens again.*] Ay ! Ye 'ear me, ye 'ear me, and fear makes ye as still as a mouse. . . . 'Tis a lonely life I live, but better to live like that, kin and comrade wi' t' stars, and t' fells, and t' runnin' streams, than among men that are slaves an' starved and lonely each one of 'em for t' fear that is in them. . . . And 'tis t' 'ardness o' thinkin' o' you, so wonderful as you be, livin' wi' t' slaves and t' small things when there's no treasure in t' world that ye might not come by if ye'd come to t' wild 'awks life wi' me. . . . An' you t'

most soft and lovely thing in t' world. . . . You're beautiful and live wi' men that 'ave never an eye among 'em to see ye. . . . Grubbin' tunnellin' moles they be. . . . Bat-blind. . . . And there's only me to see t' wonder o' ye. [JOHN BAISBROWN *appears in the gateway, sees MILES and stands stock still.*] Open to me . . . I can 'ear ye . . . and you 'ungry for every word that comes fro' my lips. . . . 'Tis known that I canna give ye a fine 'ouse and never a fine dress, but I can take a great 'ill in t' 'ollow o' my 'and and give it you, and I can reach up and pluck a star out o' 'eaven for to shine in yer 'air, and I can give yer a river to sing to ye as never man nor woman can sing o' t' wonder o' t' world . . . and I can give ye sights to see and sounds to 'ear that else 'ld be 'idden from ye all yer days. . . . Let me come to ye. . . . 'Tis dark and never a moon and 'ardly a star, but I can make t' night so light as ever t' crawling men make dark the day. . . .

[*The key turns in the door, MILES clicks the latch and thrusts the door open, when JOHN, without moving, speaks.*

JOHN. Is it you, Miles Dixon? [MILES *snaps the door to and turns. He stands with never a word, peering through the darkness.*] Is it you, Miles Dixon? and is it so ye come crawlin' in t' dead o' night like a rat for to suck the eggs o' my 'ens?

MILES. Is it you, John Baisbrown?

JOHN. Come down 'ere an' let me set my fingers to yer throat an' choke t' rotten life out o' ye. . . . Or will ye wait while I turn my back and skip

an' run away to yer 'ole in t' fells and never let me set eyes on ye more. . . .

MILES. And you, John Baisbrown? . . . Is it you standin' there in t' dark so's I can see only t' great ugly shape of ye?

JOHN. Ay.

MILES. You and me and 'er was schooled together, John Baisbrown, an' d'ye mind 'ow I beat t' bloody nose on ye till ye ran 'owlin'; and d'ye mind 'ow I was ever t' first and ye come lumberin' be'ind?

[BAISBROWN *moves heavily forward.*

JOHN. Will ye come down, ye gowk, or will I knock ye down?

MILES. Ye'll stand there and we'll talk peaceable 'ere in the dark, you standin' there in t' muck an' me wi' my feet at t' height o' yer 'ead.

JOHN. Come down.

MILES. Ye'll stand there and ye'll learn o' t' way o' a man wi' a woman what ye shut yer eyes to an' took for a sinful thing or ye'd never be standin' now, you in t' muck and me wi' my feet at t' height o' yer 'ead . . . and 'er a cowering be'ind t' door fer to 'ear what we say and to 'ear what ye do to me. . . . What will ye do, John Baisbrown?

JOHN. For every word that ye say I'll break a bone in your body, and for t' while that ye keep me standin' 'ere in t' muck an' cold o' t' yard I'll pitch ye to 'ouse wi' t' swine in whose likeness you're made.

MILES. And what will ye do to t' woman?

JOHN. There's you to be broken first and there's no other thought in me.

MILES. I canna see ye right, but is yer great fingers twitchin' to be at my throat, and is yer breast 'ot in yer, and yer mouth dry and a catch in yer throat? . . . I've more words than ye can reckon, and I've a mind that ye should learn t' way of a man wi' a woman, and 'er listenin' be'ind t' crack o' t' door o' a woman's way wi' a man . . . for 'tis that ye learn out on t' fells when ye're that strong ye can step fro' one 'ill-top to another and devil a care for t' dale beneath, and you look down and see a maggotty lot o' little black things serattin' t' earth and breakin' t' earth and thinkin' their-selves mighty fine, and a maggotty lot o' little black things that creep about wi' their eyes down to t' earth, scared and feared, feared o' t' sun and t' wind and t' rain and most feared o' theirselves and their kind, like it's you's feared on me now, ye maggotty little black thing that I look down on wi' my feet at t' height o' yer 'ead, as I looked down on ye from t' top o' t' fells and seed ye serattin' t' earth and breakin' t' earth for t' lovely thing that ye'll never find there . . . for while ye run fro' sun and wind an' rain ye never will find it. . . . 'Tis a four-fold thing and there's no fear in it. . . . And you's afeard.

JOHN. You've talked enough and too much.

MILES. And when ye've broke t' bones i' my body what will ye do to t' woman?

JOHN. 'Twill be enough for her to know what I does to you.

MILES. Ye're not so blind . . . and ye're not so far fro' bein' a man and ye're not so far

fro' lovin' t' woman that ye know t' way to
'urt 'er. . . .

JOHN. It's you that 'ave come between me
and 'er and et's you that I'll break in my 'ands
like a carrot.

MILES. 'Tis a fine lad to be broke in two by a
strong man as thinks there's law on his side. . . .
But for all that you're a poor fool, John Bais-
brown, for ye never 'ave been together, you and
'er that's cowerin' be'ind t' door, else not me
or any other thing could ha' come between ye,
and so 'tis you that is t' bad man and t' wicked
man to take t' woman and come between 'er
and t' brave things o' t' world. And 'twas a foolish
thing, for 'tis what never a man can do to come
between a woman and t' brave things o' t' world ;
you's not t' first man to try it and you's surely
not t' last man to fail . . . and by many and
many you's not t' first to set yourself above a
woman, and by many and many more you's not
t' last man to find out t' fraud o' yerself. . . .
There's more words that I 'ave for ye, but
'appen that's enough to stick i' yer gizzard.

JOHN. Come down 'ere.

MILES. And you wi' a great stick in yer 'and ?
I'll not.

[JOHN *throws his stick away.*

JOHN. Now will ye come ?

MILES. And if I come down will ye keep yer
'ands to yerself ? . . . For I've a mind to climb
to Ill Bell and see t' dawn comin' up through t'
mists and to stand wi' t' cold wind blawin'
through and through me and blawin' all t'
dirtiness o' you and t' likes o' you out o' me.

JOHN. Heh ! And will ye take t' woman wi' ye to be blawn through and through and t' dirtiness blawn oot o' 'er ?

MILES. I'll not. For she's that weak wi' bearin' wi' you I'd 'ave to carry 'er likely, and there's no wind fro' t' four quarters could blaw t' dirtiness o' you and t' likes o' you oot o' 'er.

JOHN. 'Tis moonspun madness ye 'ave in yer 'ead, and to 'it ye would be like smashing yer fist in a babby's face. . . . Ye can go.

[MILES runs lightly down the stairs.]

MILES. And if I go, what will ye do to the woman now that she'll not 'ear what ye've done to me ?

JOHN. She'll 'ave what she's always 'ad and no more.

[MILES suddenly strikes a match and holds it up to JOHN'S face until it burns his fingers, when he drops it with an oath.]

MILES. 'Tis a face like a great 'am wi' little black buttons in it for eyes. 'Tis a man's face and belongs to what in this world, God save us, is called a man. . . . We'll both be dead in the wink of an eye and the world none the wiser for the two of us, and she there listenin' be'ind t' door, if she be livin', well quit o' t' two of us. [A light appears in the woman's window.] Whoosht !

[The door is opened slowly and ELLEN appears holding a lantern high over her head. She has dressed herself hastily in bodice and skirt and has her hair loose. She stands looking down at the two men.]

MILES. She's beautiful. . . . T' dawn comin' up through t' mists.

ELLEN. Is it you, John, standing there wi' that waste o' t' world ?

JOHN. Are ye come for to go out to live in t' wide cold world an' to 'ave done wi' takin' 'im to my bed ?

ELLEN. I 'ave prayed for this night, John, an' every night that 'e's come to me and me turned soft in my bones and weak to let 'im come, I've prayed for you to come and set 'ands on 'im and break t' rotten life in 'im. . . . An' I've prayed for strength to tell ye so's ye might keep 'im away. . . . An' now that ye've come will ye let 'im go, and are you that's a man and strong as soft wi' 'im as me that's a woman ?

MILES. Ye lie and ye lie and ye know that ye lie !

ELLEN. Take 'im for that, John, take 'im and do as ye said, and for every word that 'e's said to ye break a bone in 'is body, and for those that 'e's said to me take 'im and whip the life out o' 'im.

MILES. She's t' fit mate for you, John Bais-brown, you wi' the lies o' yer deeds, and 'er wi' the lies on 'er lips. And when I'm gone—for I'm goin' out into t' world to make a fortin' and a great name where there's rich folk and gay folk and folk that 'ave never a care in t' world—when I'm gone ye'll sit and sit and watch each other wi' strange eyes and ye'll wonder and wonder what there is of truth in each other, and never a moment will she forget and never a moment will ye be rid o' t' thing that was

between ye before ever I come—t' wall o' lies ; and ye'll sit and sit until ye're dead, and ye'll both be glad when it comes for t' long, long thing ye've made o' yer lives. . . . T' life I live is fit for t' likes o' me, and t' life you live is fit for t' likes o' you. . . . I've a mind to climb to Ill Bell to see t' dawn comin' up through t' mists, and fro' there I'll leap to t' world and go stridin' over it 'till I be weary, and then I'll swim out to sea until I can swim no more. . . . And God blast the souls o' the two of ye. [*The clock in the church tower strikes again.*] 'Alf past one.

[*He turns and goes off through the gate at a run. ELLEN takes up her lantern and goes into her room. She leaves the door open, and JOHN moves towards the stairs.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

The scene is the kitchen of the farm, twenty years later. In the back wall is a window looking out on to the yard and across at the little house. In the left wall is a huge fireplace, over which hangs a stewpan in which is a mess of fruit. ELLEN BAISBROWN is stirring with a great wooden spoon. On the table in the centre of the room are piles of fruit—damsons and plums. In the right wall is a press built into the wall and carved.

It is midday.

ELLEN *has lost her looks. She is just a comely, buxom farm-woman set on the business of the moment.* JANIE, her daughter, a girl of twenty-three and as beautiful as her mother was, is picking over the fruit, setting aside that which is fit for preserving and dropping the bruised and the rotten into a basket at her feet.

JANIE. 'Tis a grand year for fruit.

ELLEN. And a bad year for us.

JANIE. I don't know what's come to our Jan sin' feyther died. . . . 'E never was afraid o' feyther for all t' fights and quarrellin' they 'ad used to 'ave, an' feyther was a strong man. [ELLEN *makes no reply.*] 'E was a strong man, feyther?

ELLEN. 'E was a *big* man, an' a *broad* man, an'

there's no knowing what 'e was and what 'e was not, same as there's never any knowin' what any critter is and is not.

JANIE. I don't know what's coom to our Jan. 'E's like he saw new things and 'eard new things and smelled new things and 'is 'ead all filled wi' strangeness. . . . Was there ever a man called Miles Dixon, moother ?

[ELLEN *drops her spoon and turns for a moment to JANIE, then turns away again and goes on with her work.*

ELLEN. Who's been tellin' you them fairy-tales ? An' what did they tell ye ?

JANIE. Was there ever such a man, moother ?

ELLEN. There was, but 'e's gone out into t' world long since and likely 'e's dead.

JANIE. It's Jan is full o' 'im and strange tales. . . . Old Peter Foot o' Kirkstone's been a tellin', and that's where our Jan goes to in t' days when we never sees him fro' dawn to dusk ; and 'e cooms to me in my bed and sits and tells o' t' wunnerful man that 'e was. . . . 'E could run an 'undred miles in a day and there wasn't a river 'e couldn't leap, and 'e could wrestle wi' ten men all at once, and 'e could swim like a fish under water, an' 'e could talk wi' birds and beasts ; an' 'e got weary o' t' fells for they werena' big enough for 'im, and 'e went out into t' world, and when 'e went there was sick 'earts in t' women, and there was an 'undred and fifty went out into t' world to look for 'im, and it's such a man that our Jan would be. . . . Was there ever such a man ?

ELLEN. There was such a man, and 'e was

that bad there was never a 'ouse int' dale would let 'im bide in 't, and 'e lived out on t' fells, wet and cold under a wall and wet and cold in a ditch. . . . But I never 'eard tell of any woman that 'e 'ad.

JANIE. And is it long ago since 'e lived out on t' fells ?

ELLEN. 'E was schooled wi' yer feyther and me. And 'tis true that 'e went out into t' world, but I never 'eard tell o' a 'eart that was sick for 'im or o' women that went out into t' world to look for 'im.

JANIE. Jan says 'e was like a buzzard 'awk, and Jan says that 'e 'll be such a man, and 'tis for that that our Jan's out and away and leavin' you and me to do all t' work. [ELLEN empties pan and JANIE brings a fresh lot of fruit for her to boil.] There was a strange man coom last night, moother.

ELLEN. A strange man ?

JANIE. I was in my little room yonder and t' light set in t' window, and there coom pebbles a' thraved 'oop.

ELLEN. What like o' man ?

JANIE. A weary thin man. . . . And a said, "Is it you ?" And I said, "Yes, it's me." And 'e said, "And John Baisbrown ?" . . . And I said, "John Baisbrown's dead."

ELLEN. And . . . ?

JANIE. What is it, moother ?

ELLEN. And what did 'e say else ?

JANIE. He stood like a gowk, an' in a soft silly voice 'e said : "T' scent o' yer 'air and t' touch o' ye 'as been wi' me ower all t' world,

and there's never t' like o' you not east nor west nor north nor south."

ELLEN. What like o' man was 'e ?

JANIE. Just a thin scarecrow wi' a bowed back and rags on 'im what 'ardly would 'old together. And 'e said : " For all t' brave sounds o' t' world there was ever t' sound o' yer voice ringin' in my ears."

ELLEN. An' you ?

JANIE. I said, " Yer daft," and banged to t' window, and then 'e coom an' 'e talked through t' door silly like, such soft talk fro' such an owd man, till I laughed out loud at 'im and 'e went away.

ELLEN. And ye was not afeared ?

JANIE. What call 'ad I to be afeard, wi' t' door locked ? 'E was just a tramp like they often cooms . . . on'y not all on 'em is so daft. . . . I just laughed, for 'tis funny to 'ear such words comin' up in an owd weary voice. . . . " You and t' scent o' yer 'air. . . ." And yet there's never a lad in t' dale could 'av said such words, 'cept only it mught be our Jan. . . . And I couldn't 'elp thinkin' 'ow feyther would a gurned at such a man, same as he gurned at our Jan for bein' aye wi' t' lasses, though there's never a lad in all t' dale that our Jan couldn't thraw in t' wink o' an eye. . . . But feyther 'e 'ad a great scorn o' women, 'im bein' such a strong man.

ELLEN. There's t' lads' dinners to be took down to croft. [JAN comes up through the yard. He draws a live rabbit from his pocket.] Are ye come fro' t' croft, Jan ?

JAN. Me ? . . . Naw. . . . That's what I been a-doin' of. . . . Caught 'im I did wi' my two 'ands an nowt else. Comin' down Wansfell out o' t' bracken 'e runs and me after 'im ; this way and that 'e turns until I took a great leap on to 'im like a buzzard 'awk. . . . And you'd 'ave me stoopin' and crampin' wi' a seythe or a rake. . . . Show me another can do that ! . . . You got my broothers slavin' like cattle, an' I say 'tis not good enough for t' likes o' me.

ELLEN. Will ye take an' kill it ?

JAN. Kill it ? . . . I'll let it free. . . . 'Tis only to show what I can do, when my broothers be that slow they'd likely never set 'ands to a urchin. . . . Take 'un wi' ye, Janie, and set 'un free. [*JANIE takes the dinner-cans on one arm, holds the rabbit by the ears, and goes out.*] I'm goin', moother ?

ELLEN. Where will ye go ?

JAN. I been up beek to where 'e cooms bubbling out o' t' ground, and I've been down beek to where 'e goes into t' lake and out o' t' lake and down past towns and cities to t' sea. And I be like beek, moother. I be like sprung out o' t' ground and I must go out and out growin' wider and wider, and I be grown so wide that there be no room for my body between Wansfell and Ill Bell. . . . D' ye not see 'ow big I be grown ? . . . I feel that strong that if ye set me to t' ploughin' I'd 'ave t' old field turned and turned too deep wi' just t' touch o' my 'and, and if ye set me to t' reapin' I'd swing t' seythe so's all t' corn 'd be scattered to t' winds and t' point o' t' scythe 'd stick into Ill Bell and coom

through and out into Yorkshire. . . . You got my broothers and my sister, and what's for them is not for me, so gi' me your blessing an' a pocketful o' money and I'll go out into t' world an' make a fortin' and a great name . . . an' a fine lady mebbe for a wife. . . .

ELLEN. A fortin' and a great name an' a fine lady mebbe for a wife! . . . What's coom t' ye, Jan?

JAN. I've a mind to be a man, moother, and not just a ox or a ass or any poor beast that works in t' fields, and not to be t' sort o' man that my feyther was, that 'ad no eye for t' sights o' t' world and no eye for its loveliness, but only for crops and crops, and 'ad no love for t' earth but only for t' money 'e could make out o' 'er. . . . You got two sons t' like o' feyther and one that never will be.

ELLEN [*facing him suddenly*]. I got two sons dear to me as their feyther was, and one that's dearer to me than all t' world; two that's good sons to me and one that I love so dearly that t' greatest joy I 'ave in 'im is a pain, and I'm glad o' t' pain and the sorrow that 'e brings me, as I was glad o' t' pain and sorrow in t' beginning.

JAN. That's strange.

ELLEN. And if you go 'twill be a lonesome life for me, for there's only you that my eyes love to see.

JAN. But there's two sons that's as dear to you as my feyther was.

ELLEN. And that's nothin' at all. . . . For it's true that 'e 'ad no eyes for t' sights o' t' world and no eye for its loveliness, and 'e never

'ad no eye for t' loveliness o' me, and 'e 'ated you that I loved most dearly. . . .

JAN. That's strange . . . and 'tis true that 'e 'ated me, and true that I 'ated the sight o' 'im. . . . And those two that's like 'im 'ate me, and I 'ate them, and it 'as always been you and me against t' rest o' 'em. . . . And 'tis that 'as made me so strong. . . . There's three o' them against one o' me, and though I could take and crush t' three on 'em, there is that strength in a man that makes 'im gentle and soft. And it's t' weak men wantin' t' strength they never can 'ave that is so 'arsh and cruel, and 'tis t' strength in women like you, moother, that makes me so gentle and soft. . . .

ELLEN. And if ye'd bide . . .

JAN. If ye took beek and tried to make 'im live in a bucket ye'd not be tryin' a more foolish thing than to make me live 'ere on t' farm like any other one in t' dale. . . . Give me your blessing, moother, and a pocketful of money, and let me go out into t' world for to see its wonders and it to see me for t' wunnerful man that I am.

[ELLEN goes to the press, and after groping in a far corner of it produces an old Toby jug, from which she brings a stocking. She pours out the contents of it on the table.

JAN. I'll catch a fine lady like I caught lile rabbit, an' . . . an' . . . an' I'll not let 'er go free. . . : And I'll give 'er all t' wonder o' t' world, and all t' lovely things ye can find for t' seekin' and cannot come by other ways. . . .

For I'm wise, and I'm strong, and I'm swift, and I'm sure.

ELLEN. There's a fourth o' t' savings that yer feyther made.

JAN. There was a man like me in t' dale once, moother, and 'e went out into t' world, and there was never t' likes o' 'im again till me. . . .

ELLEN. And 'im dead, likely. . . . 'E never coom back. . . . I never 'eard tell o' any glory that 'e coom by.

JAN. And was 'e a man like me ?

ELLEN. As much as a beech-tree is like an elder-bush. . . . But a man . . . like you.

JAN. Then 'e *was* a man ?

ELLEN. 'Appen. . . . Ye'll 'ave yer money in yer bag ? . . . And what'll ye do when 'tis all gone ?

JAN. Likes o' me don't live by money. . . . 'Tis like pretty things to play with. . . . 'E never 'ad money, did 'e ?

ELLEN. Never stick nor stock.

[JAN pours the money from one hand to the other.

JAN. 'Tis pretty. . . . Buttercups and daisies. . . . And won't tha just go rollin' and rollin'. . . . It'll be a grand man that cooms back to ye, moother, for if all t' world is full o' such blind fools as is 'ere there's nowt t' likes o' me canna do.

ELLEN. Ye'll learn. . . . Wise and strong and swift and sure ye may be, but . . . ye'll learn. . . . T' blind fools is many, and t' man wi' eyes to see is one in thousands. It's many against one.

JAN. And if they get in my way . . . I'll set foot on 'em.

[A pedlar comes past the window, a ragged man with pack on back. He is weary and thin. He knocks at the door, and ELLEN opens. The pedlar stands in the door and begins to take his pack from his back. ELLEN knows him at once for MILES DIXON, but she gives no sign. He stares intently at her, but gives no sign. JAN is not particularly interested, but goes on counting out his money and playing with it across the table.]

MILES. Good day to ye.

ELLEN. Good day to ye.

MILES. Can I show ye what I 'ave ?

ELLEN. Come in and show me.

[MILES comes in and lays his pack on the table.]

JAN. Sixteen pounds. . . . Are ye come from t' world ?

MILES. God knows where I be not come from, young master.

JAN. An' I be just goin' out into it.

MILES. Ye'd best bide 'ere.

JAN. So moother's sayin' ; but she never 'ave seed what I see an' she never 'ave knowed what I know. . . .

MILES. And what like o' place d' ye think t' world to be, young master ?

JAN. Just a great wide place wi' a city 'ere and a city there and room for a man that's growed too wide to live between fell and fell. . . .

MILES [*fiercely*]. 'Ave ye ever 'ad th' 'unger in yer belly, young master ?

JAN. N-naw.

MILES. It's that ye'll 'ave in t' world. . . . 'Ave ye ever 'ad th' 'unger i' yer soul, young master?

JAN. N-naw.

MILES. It's that ye'll 'ave in t' world, young master, an' ye'll be no more than a drop o' water in t' wide sea . . . and one man just like another. . . . And ye'll be sick for a bed to lie on, and sick for a fire to warm ye, and there'll be never a day but ye'll curse t' day ye ever set foot on t' road, and ye'll learn that ye can never turn back, and ye'll be brought to envy o' bird and beast and tree and 'ate o' men, for ye'll not find charity or kindness or any good in 'em once ye turn yer back on yer ain kin and kind . . . and so I tell ye.

JAN. Is it such a fearful place?

MILES. 'Tis a place the like o' this, between fell and fell, and t' man that winna be shaped to it is broke. . . . For there's no place in this world where a man can be free, and freedom and t' great life and all t' things that come into a young man's thoughts wi t' wind are not in t' world but in 'is 'cart. . . . What will ye buy?

ELLEN [*choosing*]. This and this and this.

JAN. 'Ave ye a pretty thing for me to give to my moother before I go. . . . I've a great lot o' money.

MILES. Ye've a mind to go?

JAN. Aye. . . . What's been done to t' likes o' you will never be done to t' likes o' me.

MILES. Are ye that strong?

JAN. And swift . . . I can catch a rabbit wi' my 'ands.

MILES. Can ye run a 'undred miles in a day ?

JAN. N-naw.

MILES. Can ye leap every stream in t' country ?

JAN. N-naw.

MILES. Can ye wrastle wi' ten men all at once ?

JAN. N-naw.

MILES. Can ye talk wi' birds and beasts ?

JAN. N-naw.

MILES. Can ye pluck a star out o' 'eaven for to shine in a woman's 'air ?

JAN. N-naw.

MILES. Nor me. . . . But there was a day when I could do every one o' these things.

JAN. An' you . . .

MILES. And off I went out into t' world greedy for t' sights and scents and sounds of it, and look at me what I am, just a ragged broken man. . . . And I said that when I was weary I would swim out to sea until I could swim no more. When I was weary I did swim out, but back I coom to my weariness and took my pack on my back and come by a long, long road to see t' fells that wasna big enough for me and t' folk that was too small for me and too blind. . . . And what pretty thing will ye buy ?

JAN. And you was a strong man and a wise man, an' a swift man, and a sure man ?

MILES. I was.

JAN. And you was like a buzzard 'awk ?

[ELLEN *has turned to her stewpan.*

MILES. I was.

JAN. And was you Miles Dixon ?

MILES. I was.

[JAN *dives into his pocket and brings up his money.*

JAN. My feyther was a stronger man than you. [*He takes up his cap and goes, turning at the door.*] Moother, I be goin' down to croft.

[*He goes.*

ELLEN. It's a 'ard life you've 'ad of it. . . .

MILES. Aye.

ELLEN. 'Tis a 'ard life I've 'ad of it.

MILES. 'E was a stronger man than me. . . .
Was 'e bad to ye ?

ELLEN. Never. . . . And never again was your name on his lips, but there was never a day but t' thought o' you coom to 'im, and I was just a woman livin' in 'is 'ouse, and 'e 'ated t' sight o' that lad. . . . Ye come last night ?

MILES. Aye.

ELLEN. I'll 'ave this and this.

[*She takes money from her purse and pays him.*

MILES. And 'im dead. . . .

ELLEN. And 'im dead, and me not lonelier than I was wi' 'im in t' 'ouse. . . . And you ?

MILES. And me wi' no restin' place and a sick soul that will not let me bide ; often 'unger i' my belly and always 'unger i' my soul for takin' you that never was mine. . . . And if there was never a day but t' thought o' me come between 'im and you, there was never a day but t' thought o' you come between me and t' world. . . . And if ye'd give me to eat.

[*ELLEN sets food and drink before him.*

ELLEN. It come to me that there was nothin'

in t' world so dear to me as that lad, and 'im you've saved for me.

MILES. T' scorn 'e 'ad of me !

ELLEN. Will ye be goin' now ?

MILES. I'll live t' way I've lived these long years. [*He shoulders his pack.*] You're not t' woman that was so beautiful. . . .

ELLEN. And you're not t' man that coom to me out o' t' night so fine and strong. . . .

MILES. We're queer cattle.

[*He goes out and through the yard. ELLEN returns to her work. JANIE comes and stands at the door.*]

JANIE. Why, moother, that's t' man that stood in t' dark last night and said they silly soft things. . . .

ELLEN. See what I bought from 'im.

JANIE. Oh, t' pretty things.

[*ELLEN restores JAN'S money to the Toby jug in the press.*]

CURTAIN

MARY'S WEDDING

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

MARY	Miss Irene Rooke.
TOM	Mr. Herbert Lomas.
ANN	Miss Mary Goulden.
MRS. AIREY	Miss Muriel Pratt.
BILL AIREY	Mr. Charles Bibby.
TWO MAIDS.	
VILLAGERS AND OTHERS.	

SCENE : *The Davis's Cottage.*

NOTE. *There is no attempt made in the play to reproduce exactly the Westmorland dialect, which would be unintelligible to ears coming new to it, but only to catch the rough music of it and the slow inflection of northern voices.*

Produced at the Coronet Theatre, May 1912

MARY'S WEDDING

The scene is the living-room in the Davis's cottage in the hill country. An old room low in the ceiling. ANN DAVIS is at the table in the centre of the room untying a parcel. The door opens to admit TOM DAVIS, a sturdy quarryman dressed in his best and wearing a large nosegay.

ANN. Well, 'ast seed un ?

TOM. Ay, a seed un. 'Im and 'is ugly face——

ANN [*untying her parcel*]. 'Tis 'er dress come just in time an' no more from the maker-up——

TOM. Ef she wouldna do it. . . .

ANN. But 'tis such long years she's been a-waitin'. . . . 'Tis long years since she bought t' dress.

TOM. An' 'tis long years she'll be a livin' wi' what she's been waitin' for ; 'tis long years she'll live to think ower it and watch the thing she's taken for her man, an' long years that she'll find 'un feedin' on 'er, an' a dreary round she'll 'ave of et. . . .

ANN. Three times she 'ave come to a month of weddin', an' three times 'e 'ave broke loose and gone down to the Mortal Man an' the woman that keeps 'arf our men in drink. . . . 'Tis she is the wicked one, giving 'em score an' score again 'till they owe more than they can ever pay with a year's money.

TOM. 'Tis a fearful thing is drink. . . .

ANN. So I telled 'er in the beginnin' of it all, knowin' what like of man 'e was. An' so I telled 'er last night only.

TOM. She be set on it ?

ANN. Ay, an' 'ere's t' pretty dress for 'er to be wedded in. . . .

TOM. What did she say ?

ANN. Twice she 'ave broke wi' 'im, and twice she 'ave said that ef 'e never touched the drink fur six months she would go to be churched wi' 'im. She never 'ave looked at another man.

TOM. Ay, she be one o' they quiet ones that goes about their work an' never 'as no romantic notions but love only the more for et. There've been men come for 'er that are twice the man that Bill is, but she never looks up from 'er work at 'em.

ANN. I think she must 'a' growed up lovin' Bill. 'Tis a set thing surely.

TOM. An' when that woman 'ad 'im again an' 'ad 'im roaring drunk fur a week, she never said owt but turned to 'er work agin an' set aside the things she was makin' agin the weddin'. . . .

ANN. What did 'e say to 'er?

TOM. Nowt. 'E be 'most as chary o' words as she. 'E've got the 'ouse an' everything snug, and while 'e works 'e makes good money.

ANN. 'Twill not end, surely.

TOM. There was 'is father and two brothers all broken men by it.

[She hears MARY on the stairs, and they are silent.]

ANN. 'Ere's yer pretty dress, Mary.

MARY. Ay. . . . Thankye, Tom.

TOM. 'Twill be lovely for ye, my dear, an' grand. 'Tis a fine day fur yer weddin', my dear. . . .

MARY. I'll be sorry to go, Tom.

TOM. An' sorry we'll be to lose ye. . . .

MARY. I'll put the dress on.

[She throws the frock over her arm and goes out with it.]

ANN. Another girl would 'a' wedded him years ago in the first foolishness of it. But Mary, for all she says so little, 'as long, long thoughts that never comes to the likes o' you and me. . . . Another girl, when the day 'ad come at last, would 'a' been wild wi' the joy an' the fear o' it. . . . But Mary, she's sat on the fells under the stars, an' windin' among the sheep. D' ye mind the nights she's been out like an old shepherd wi' t' sheep? D' ye mind the nights when she was but a lile 'un an' we found 'er out in the dawn sleepin' snug again the side o' a fat ewe.

TOM. 'Tis not like a weddin' day for 'er. . . . If she'd 'ad a new dress, now——

ANN. I said to 'er would she like a new dress; but she would have only the old 'un, cut an' shaped to be in the fashion. . . . Et 'as been a strange coortin', an' 'twill be a strange life for 'em both, I'm thinkin', for there seems no gladness in 'er, nor never was, for she never was foolish an' she never was young; but she was always like there was a great weight on 'er, so as she must be about the world alone, but always

she 'ave turned to the little things an' the weak, an' always she 'ad some poor sick beast for tendin' or another woman's babe to 'old to 'er breast, an' I think sometimes that 'tis only because Bill is a poor sick beast wi' a poor sick soul that she be so set on 'im.

TOM. 'E be a sodden beast wi' never a soul to be saved or damned——

ANN. 'Cept for the drink, 'e've been a good son to 'is old mother when the others 'ud 'a' left 'er to rot i' the ditch, an' 'e was the on'y one as 'ud raise a finger again his father when the owd man, God rest him, was on to 'er like a madman. Drunk or sober 'e always was on 'is mother's side.

TOM. 'Twas a fearful 'ouse that.

ANN. 'Twas wonderful that for all they did to 'er, that wild old man wi' 'is wild young sons, she outlived 'em all, but never a one could she save from the curse that was on them, an', sober, they was the likeliest men i' Troutbeck. . . .

TOM. 'Tis when the rain comes and t' clouds come low an' black on the fells and the cold damp eats into a man's bones that the fearful thoughts come to 'im that must be drowned or 'im go mad—an' only the foreigners like me or them as 'as foreign blood new in 'em can 'old out again it; 'tis the curse o' livin' too long between two line o' 'ills.

ANN. An' what that owd woman could never do, d'ye think our Mary'll do it? 'Im a Troutbeck man an' she a Troutbeck girl?

TOM. She've 'eld to 'er bargain an' brought 'im to it.

ANN. There's things that a maid can do that a wife cannot an' that's truth, an' shame it is to the men. [*Comes a knock at the door.*] 'Tisn't time for t' weddin' folk.

[*TOM goes to the window.*]

TOM. Gorm. 'Tis Mrs. Airey.

ANN. T'owd woman. She that 'as not been further than 'er garden-gate these ten years?

[*She goes to the door, opens it to admit MRS.*

AIREY, *an old gaunt woman just beginning to be bent with age.*]

MRS. A. Good day to you, Tom Davis.

TOM. Good day to you, Mrs. Airey.

MRS. A. Good day to you, Ann Davis.

ANN. Good day to you, Mrs. Airey. Will ye sit down?

[*She dusts a chair and MRS. AIREY sits by the fireside. She sits silent for long while*

TOM and ANN look uneasily at her and at each other.

MRS. A. So 'tis all ready for Bill's wedding.

TOM. Ay. 'Tis a fine day, an' the folks bid, and the sharry-bang got for to drive to Coniston, all the party of us. Will ye be coming, Mrs. Airey?

MRS. A. I'll not. [*MRS. AIREY sits silent again for long.*] Is Mary in the 'ouse?

ANN. She be upstairs puttin' on 'er weddin' dress.

MRS. A. 'Tis the sad day of 'er life. . . . They're a rotten lot, an' who should know et better than me? Bill's the best of 'em, but Bill's rotten. . . . Six months is not enough, nor six years nor sixty, not while 'er stays in Troutbeck

rememberin' all that 'as been an' all the trouble that was in the 'ouse along o' it, and so I've come for to say it.

ANN. She growed up lovin' Bill, and 'tis a set thing. She've waited long years. 'Tis done now, an' what they make for themselves they make, an' 'tis not for us to go speirin' for the trouble they may make for themselves, but only to pray that it may pass them by. . . .

MRS. A. But 'tis certain. . . . Six months is not enough, nor six years nor sixty—

ANN. And are ye come for to tell Mary this . . . ?

MRS. A. This and much more. . . .

TOM. And what 'ave ye said to Bill ?

MRS. A. Nowt. There never was a son would give 'eed to 'is mother. . . . 'Tisn't for 'im I'm thinkin', but for t' children that she'll bear 'im. I 'oped, and went on 'opin' till there was no 'ope left in me, and I lived to curse the day that each one of my sons was born. John and Peter are dead an' left no child behind, and it were better for Bill also to leave no child behind. There's a day and 'alf a day o' peace and content for a woman with such a man, and there's long, long years of thinkin' on the peace and content that's gone. There's long, long years of watching the child that you've borne and suckled turn rotten, an' I say that t' birth-pangs are nowt to t' pangs that ye 'ave from the childer of such a man as Bill or Bill's father. . . . She's a strong girl, an' a good girl ; but there's this that is stronger than 'er.

[MARY comes again, very pretty in her blue dress. She is at once sensible of the strange-

ness in TOM and ANN. She stands looking from one to the other. MRS. AIREY sits gazing into the fire.

MARY. Why, mother . . . 'tis kind of you to come on this morning.

MRS. A. Ay, 'tis kind of me. [*ANN steals away upstairs and TOM, taking the lead from her, goes out into the road.*] Come 'ere, my pretty.

[*MARY goes and stands by her*

MARY. The sun is shining and the bees all out and busy to gather in the 'oney.

MRS. A. 'Tis the bees as is t' wise people to work away in t' dark when t' sun is hidden, and to work away in t' sun when 'tis bright and light. 'Tis the bees as is t' wise people that takes their men an' kills 'em for the 'arm that they may do, and it's us that's the foolish ones to make soft the way of our men an' let them strut before us and lie; and 'tis us that's the foolish ones ever to give a thought to their needs that give never a one to ours.

MARY. 'Tis us that's t' glorious ones to 'elp them that is so weak, and 'tis us that's the brave and the kind ones to let them 'ave the 'ole world to play with when they will give never a thought to us that gives it t' em.

MRS. A. My pretty, my pretty, there's never a one of us can 'elp a man that thinks 'isself a man an' strong, poor fool, an' there's never a one of us can 'elp a man that's got a curse on 'im and is rotten through to t' bone, an' not one day can you be a 'elp to such a man as this. . . .

MARY. There's not one day that I will not try,

and not one day that I will not fight to win 'im back. . . .

MRS. A. The life of a woman is a sorrowful thing. . . .

MARY. For all its sorrow, 'tis a greater thing than t' life of a man . . . an' so I'll live it. . . .

MRS. A. Now you're strong and you're young. —'Ope's with ye still and life all before ye—and so I thought when my day came, and so I did. There was a day and 'alf a day of peace and content, and there was long, long years of thinking on the peace and content that are gone. . . . Four men all gone the same road, and me left looking down the way that they are gone and seeing it all black as the pit. . . . I be a poor old woman now with never a creature to come near me in kindness, an' I was such a poor old woman before ever the 'alf of life was gone, an' so you'll be if you take my son for your man. He's the best of my sons, but I curse the day that ever he was born. . . .

MARY. There was never a man the like of Bill. If ye see 'un striding the 'ill, ye know 'tis a man by 'is strong, long stride; and if ye see 'un leapin' an' sercein' down th' 'ill, ye know 'tis a man; and if ye see 'un in t' quarry, ye know 'tis a strong man. . . .

MRS. A. An' if ye see 'un lyin' drunk i' the ditch, not roarin' drunk, but rotten drunk, wi' 'is face fouled an' 'is clothes mucked, ye know 'tis the lowest creature of the world. . . .

[MARY stands staring straight in front of her.]

MARY. Is it for this that ye come to me to-day?

MRS. A. Ay, for this : that ye may send 'un back to 'is rottenness, for back to it 'e'll surely go when 'tis too late, an' you a poor old woman like me, with never a creature to come near ye in kindness, before ever the bloom 'as gone from your bonny checks, an' maybe childer that'll grow up bonny an' then be blighted for all the tenderness ye give to them ; an' those days will be the worst of all—far worse than the day when ye turn for good an' all into yourself from t' man that will give ye nowt. . . . 'Tis truly the bees as is the wise people. . . .

MARY. It's a weary waitin' that I've had, and better the day and 'alf a day of peace and content with all the long years of thinking on it than all the long, long years of my life to go on waitin' and waitin' for what has passed me by, for if he be the rottenest, meanest man in t' world that ever was made, there is no other that I can see or ever will. It is no wild foolishness that I am doing : I never was like that ; but it's a thing that's growed wi' me an' is a part o' me—an' though every day o' my life were set before me now so I could see to the very end, an' every day sadder and blacker than the last, I'd not turn back. I gave 'im the bargain, years back now, and three times 'e 'as failed me ; but 'e sets store by me enough to do this for me a fourth time—'Twas kind of ye to come. . . .

MRS. A. You're strong an' you're young, but there's this that's stronger than yourself—

MARY. Maybe, but 'twill not be for want o' fightin' wi' 't.

MRS. A. 'Twill steal on ye when you're weakest, an' come on ye in your greatest need. . . .

MARY. It 'as come to this day an' there is no goin' back. D' ye think I've not seed t' soft, gentle things that are given to other women, an' not envied them? D' ye think I've not seed 'em walkin' shut-eyed into all sorts o' foolishness an' never askin' for the trewth o' it, an' not envied 'em for doin' that? D' ye think I've not seed the girls I growed wi' matin' lightly an' lightly weddin', an' not envied 'em for that, they wi' a 'ouse an' babes an' me drudgin' away on t' farm, me wi' my man to 'and an' only this agin 'im? D' ye think I've not been tore in two wi' wantin' to close my eyes an' walk like others into it an' never think what is to come? 'There's many an' many a night that I've sat there under t' stars wi' t' three counties afore me an' t' sea, an' t' lake below, an' t' sheep croppin', an' my own thoughts for all the comp'ny that I 'ad, an' fightin' this way an' that for to take 'un an' let 'un be so rotten as ever 'e might be; an' there's many an' many a night when the thoughts come so fast that they hurt me an' I lay pressed close to t' ground wi' me 'ands clawin' at it an' me teeth bitin' into t' ground for to get closer an' 'ide from myself; an' many a night when I sat there seein' the man as t' brave lad 'e was when I seed 'un first leapin' down the 'ill, an' knowin' that nothin' in the world, nothin' that I could do to 'un or that 'e could do 'isself, would ever take that fro' me. . . . In all the time o' my weary waitin' there 'as never been a soul that

I told so much to, an' God knows there never 'as been an' never will be a time when I can tell as much to 'im. . . .

MRS. A. My pretty, my pretty, 'tis a waste an' a wicked, wicked waste. . . .

MARY. 'Tis a day an' 'alf a day agin never a moment. . . .

MRS. A. 'Tis that, and so 'tis wi' all o' us . . . an' so 'twill be. . . . God bless ye, my dear. . . .

[ANN comes down. MARY is looking out of the window.

ANN. Ye forgot the ribbon for yer 'air, that I fetched 'specially fro' t' town.

MARY. Why, yes. Will ye tie it, Ann ?

[ANN ties the ribbon in her hair.

MRS. A. Pretty, my dear, oh ! pretty——

MARY. I'm to walk to t' church o' Tom's arm. . . ?

ANN. An' I to Tom's left ; wi' the bridesmaids be'ind, an' the rest a followin'. . . .

[TOM returns, followed by two GIRLS bringing armfuls of flowers. With these they deck

the room, and keep the choicest blooms for

MARY. ANN and the three girls are busied with making MARY reach her most beautiful.

MRS. AIREY goes. At intervals one VILLAGER

and another comes to give greeting or to

bring some small offering of food or some

small article of clothing. MARY thanks them

all with rare natural grace. They call her

fine, and ejaculate remarks of admiration :

"The purty bride. . . ." "She's beautiful.

. . . ." " 'Tis a luckylad, Bill Airey. . . ."

The church bell begins to ring. . . . All

is prepared and all are ready. . . . MARY is given her gloves, which she draws on—when the door is thrown open and BILL AIREY lunges against the lintel of the door and stands leering. He is just sober enough to know what he is at. He is near tears, poor wretch. He is not horribly drunk. He stands surveying the group and they him.

BILL. I come—I come—I—I c-come for to—to—to—show—to show myself . . .

[HE turns in utter misery and goes. MARY plucks the flowers from her bosom and lets them fall to the ground; draws her gloves off her hands and lets them fall. The bell continues to ring.

CURTAIN

A SHORT WAY WITH AUTHORS

A BURLESQUE

CHARACTERS

MR. BESSEMER STEEL

MR. CHEESEMAN CLAY

MR. PERCY VIGO

MR. BAUERKELLER

BATEMAN

CALLBOY

DRESSER

MISS BRITANNIA METAL.

SCENE : *A Dressing-room in a London Theatre.*

This play has not been acted in any theatre.

A SHORT WAY WITH AUTHORS

The scene is a dressing-room in a London theatre.

Time 7.30 P.M.

Door R. Door leading into a little room L. back, up a stair or two.

Walls decorated with portraits of Mr. Bessemer Steel.

Desk L., on which is a telephone. Dressing-table and cheval-glass L.

In the far right-hand corner is a miserable-looking individual with a brown-paper parcel in his hand. This is MR. CHEESEMAM CLAY.

The telephone rings ; the door up the little stairs is opened, and BATEMAN, the dresser, runs down to the telephone. He leaves the door open, showing a glimpse of BESSEMER STEEL struggling with his clothes. He is dressing for a Georgian part.

BATEMAN [*at telephone*]. Who ? . . . Mr. Vigo ? . . . Has he an appointment ? . . . Right.

CLAY [*timidly*]. Do you think Mr. Steel could see me now ? I've been here an hour and a half.

[BATEMAN ignores him and returns to the dressing-room. CLAY slowly unwraps his parcel. As he does so, the door opens and youngish man enters with a large envelope under his arm. This is MR. VIGO. He comes up to CLAY with nervous effusiveness.]

VIGO. Mr. Bessemer Steel ? . . . How do you do ? . . . Shall I read my play to you ?

[*He begins to draw it out of his envelope.*

CLAY. I wouldn't if I were you.

VIGO. I beg your pardon.

CLAY. I wouldn't if I were you. . . . You see, I'm not Mr. Bessemer Steel . . . luckily.

VIGO. Oh. . . . I have an appointment with Mr. Steel for half-past seven.

CLAY. So have I . . . for six.

VIGO. Oh !

CLAY. He's in there . . . dressing.

VIGO. Oh !

[*VIGO sits and there is a moment of painful silence. BATEMAN bustles across the room and out by the other door. STEEL puts his head out of the dressing-room door.*

STEEL. Anybody there ?

CLAY. Two of us. . . .

STEEL. Can't come out. . . . Dem breeches have split. . . . Oh, it's you, Clay. . . . How do ?

VIGO. My name is Vigo . . . Percy Vigo.

STEEL. Oh, heard of you. . . . Knock-out for old Ibsen. . . . What ? . . . Shan't be long once I'm sewn up.

CLAY. Doing well ?

STEEL. Rotten. . . . They won't take it . . . won't take anything. . . . No money in front of the house. . . . Plenty behind . . . thank God. . . . Part for me, Mr. Vigo ?

VIGO. I don't know any one who could play it better.

STEEL. I should think not . . . I didn't ask that. Part for me is what I said.

VIGO. You shall see.

STEEL. Wait till I've got my breeches mended.
. . . Dem that Bateman. . . . You young
men will write plays . . . God knows why. . . .
We want parts . . . plummy ones.

[BATEMAN returns with a fattish woman armed
with needle and cotton. They go into the
dressing-room and the door is shut. CLAY
and VIGO sit in silence for a little.

CLAY. Your first play ?

VIGO. My name is Vigo. . . . I have had three
plays produced in the provinces.

CLAY. My name is Clay . . . Cheeseman Clay.

VIGO. A dramatist ?

CLAY. They did a curtain-raiser once—twelve
years ago. I thought I was a made man and I
threw up my position in a bank.

VIGO. I'm in Fleet Street.

CLAY. Better stay there.

VIGO. We must get life into the theatre. . . .

CLAY. You can't do it . . . it goes in at one
end and out at the other. . . .

VIGO. Is that a play ?

[He points to CLAY's parcel.

CLAY. Yes. I've been reading it to him for
ten years. He never listens.

VIGO. New school ?

CLAY. It was new school when I wrote it. I
don't know what it is now. It keeps me alive.
. . . Sometimes I get a hundred down for it ;
sometimes I don't. . . . I've had four agree-
ments for it with a penalty of £250. . . . They've
always paid the penalty, and I'd be sorry if it
was produced . . . I'd have to write another.

VIGO. I'll trouble you not to pull my leg, sir.

CLAY. I'm not pulling your leg. That's my profession. I'm an unsuccessful dramatist. I write to each of the managers once a year and say I would like to read my new play to them. . . . Same old play. . . . I give it a new name—it's called *Heart's Misery* now; I read bits of it and sketch out the idea. . . . They don't listen, so it doesn't matter what you say. . . . And sometimes they give me a hundred down. Sometimes they take it for two years . . . I never give them more, it isn't safe; and I pray to Almighty God that they won't produce it. . . . If you find that a little monotonous you can sometimes make a contract for adaptation with the authors of famous novels. . . . The managers'll give you money down for the name . . . and that's quite safe. You needn't write a word, for the greatest novel of the century is always dead in a year. Nobody reads it. Nobody cares. It's like my play—same old novel with a new name. . . . And sometimes I wish myself back at the bank. You do know where you are there. . . . But the theatre's exciting.

VIGO. Sir . . . this is an appalling state of things.

CLAY. Oh, no. It's quite comfortable. I'm sorry. I thought you'd better know the ropes before you tackle Bessemer. He won't listen.

VIGO. My play is of the sort that compels a hearing.

CLAY. There isn't such a kind of play. . . . Nobody listens . . . nobody cares. It's nothing but a game of losing some one else's money.

VIGO [*excitedly*]. The theatre is a machine with which to feed the imagination of the people.

CLAY. You'd better not. . . . If the public had imagination and a sense of humour they wouldn't stand Bessemer for a week.

[*The dressing-room door opens and BESSEMER STEEL appears attired in a much ruffled shirt and satin breeches. BATEMAN carries a brocade coat and waistcoat. He goes to the mirror and turns on the electric light. STEEL goes to the cheval-glass and parades himself in front of it. He draws himself up and spouts.*

STEEL. "Has the King honour? . . . I have honour too. Never shall it be said that Bainton Cholmondely, wild gamester though he is, besmirched the fame and honour of his family. . . . Why, I have diced away my patrimony, boxed the watch, wagered the impossible, and won and lost. . . ."—It's rotten muck. . . . Can't think why the public doesn't like it.

BATEMAN. I said they wouldn't, sir.

STEEL. Old Bateman, most potent, grave, and reverend Bateman, you never do believe in anything but Shakespeare. . . .

BATEMAN. You can't do better than that, sir.

STEEL. But we can't all do it. . . . There are so many idiots alive who will write plays . . . confound 'em.

BATEMAN. Tssh! Tssh!

STEEL. Eh? . . . Oh, beg pardon, gentlemen. [*He turns to VIGO and CLAY.*] How do you like my costume? From first to last it cost two

hundred pounds. . . . The brocade is of the period . . . guaranteed. Might have been worn by Fox or Sheridan. . . . I've done everything I could for this play, but they won't take it. . . . Miss Metal's lace is genuine, every stitch of it. Real Irish point and a dem lot of it. . . . Four hundred pounds. . . . But they won't take it, you know. . . . It's a rotten year, that's what it is. I've tried everything. . . .

VIGO. Except a play.

STEEL. Eh? I've tried everything, everything. Baby, mother's tears. . . . No go . . . they won't weep. . . . Frolicking peer, band-box, scene on a yacht, comic servant . . . they won't laugh. I've given 'em French farce, as French as French, adapted, of course, and the papers said I was vulgar. . . . I've given 'em American sentiment . . . treacle; it turned 'em sick. . . . And look at the engagements I've made! Every actress with any backing in London. . . . No, it's a rotten year . . . that's what it is; it's a rotten year. . . . Damme, I'll have to let my theatre to an American and go to Australia.

BATEMAN. You don't get me going out of London, sir.

STEEL. No. You're lucky, Bateman. You're thrown in for the rent. . . . Well, the play's the thing.

VIGO [*startled*]. Eh?

STEEL. The play's the thing . . . provided there's anything like a part in it for me. . . . What have you got for me, Clay?

CLAY. A drama in four acts. You are the

noble gentleman who sacrifices all save his honour for another.

STEEL. Oh, better throw in his honour . . . They like that. . . . Honour rooted in dishonour, you know.

VIGO. Quite a common experience.

STEEL. What am I—a duke . . . or a younger son ?

CLAY. You can be whatever you like.

STEEL. Modern ?

CLAY. Of course.

STEEL. You won't mind if I make up. [*He sits at the dressing-table.*] What about a trial scene—or a fight on the cliff with my wife hanging by a rope half-way down ? . . . Have I a wife ?

CLAY. If you like.

STEEL. I sec. . . . She deserts me. My sacrifice is to cover her reputation. I'm a young man . . . Under-Secretary . . . or a diplomatist.

CLAY. You play diplomatists so well.

STEEL. I am wronged, but for her sake . . .

VIGO. Whose ?

STEEL. For the sake of the woman I love I bear with injustice. . . . My chief, the Minister for War, calls on my wife, and . . . and leaves his papers behind. . . . The letter is found. . . . My honour is cleared.

CLAY. Yes.

STEEL. By Jove, Clay, you *have* written a play this time !

CLAY. I'm glad you like it.

STEEL. Give me the list of the characters . . . I can listen while I'm making up. [*CLAY hands*

him a sheet of paper.] H'm . . . Sir Derek Verrinder. . . . Baronet?

CLAY. Bart. . . . by all means, Bart.; V.C., M.V.O., if you like.

STEEL. Yes; initials look well on the programme.

VIGO. Besides being a hint to the Prime Minister.

STEEL. Yes; they've all got it now. . . . Like so many clever men, I've always been on the wrong side in politics.

VIGO. The trouble is that there isn't a right side.

STEEL. Go on, Mr. Clay.

[He goes on with his make-up.

CLAY *[opening his script]*. Act I.

STEEL. Which act has the big scene? How many acts are there?

CLAY. Four.

STEEL. Which is the court scene . . . you did say it was a court scene? . . . Oh, no . . . fight on a cliff.

CLAY. Act III.

STEEL. Read that . . . don't worry about the first two. . . . I know you, old man . . . perfect technique . . . splendid. . . . I remember your last play. . . . By Jove, that was fine . . . fine! But I was so full up. Who took it? . . . no one. . . . I am surprised. . . . There is no writer of whom we have greater hopes than Mr. Clay, Mr. Vigo. . . . You don't object to Mr. Vigo hearing you, Mr. Clay?

VIGO. I wanted to read a play of my own to you.

STEEL. A play? . . . of course. . . . I know

what your play's about, Clay, old man. . . .
Dem fine play too. . . . What do you say to
our listening to Mr. Vigo's ?

CLAY. I've been waiting since six o'clock.

VIGO. I'm going to read my play.

CLAY. You've begun on mine.

VIGO. You've got to hear mine.

CLAY. There's money in my play.

VIGO. There's thousands in mine.

STEEL. There's only twenty minutes before
my call . . . I can hardly hear you both.
Suppose you toss for it.

VIGO. Well——

CLAY. I don't know. . . .

STEEL. Come . . . you can't quarrel.

VIGO. All right.

STEEL. Well . . . Clay ?

CLAY. All right.

STEEL. I'll toss and give you three calls. . . .
Heads Vigo, tails Clay. [*He tosses.*] Heads . . .
one to Vigo. [*He tosses again.*] Tails . . . one to
Clay. [*He tosses again.*] Tails . . . one to Clay.
Clay's won. . . . Hooray ! Good old Clay. . . .
I say, I'll toss you for shillings.

CLAY. I've only got one.

STEEL. Vigo, I'll toss you for shillings.

VIGO. I'm going to read my play.

STEEL. No sportsman. . . . What do you say
to poker . . . ? Bateman'll come in.

VIGO. I don't gamble.

STEEL. Bridge, then.

VIGO. I can't play.

STEEL. Have a drink, then ?

VIGO. I don't drink.

STEEL. Good God, have you brought me a dramatisation of Moody and Sankey?

BATEMAN. Better get on with the make-up, sir.

STEEL. Eh? Oh, yes. They're no sportsmen.

BATEMAN. I fancy the gentlemen came on business, sir.

STEEL. Oh, yes. Read your dem play, then.
. . . It can't be worse than the one I'm doing.

[*He sits again. CLAY sits by his side; VIGO umbrageously some distance away.*]

CLAY [*reads*]. "Act III. . . . The scene is the vestibule of the Hotel du Lion d'Or at Maloggia."

STEEL. I thought you said it was a cliff.

CLAY. No . . . you said that. The cliff is off.

STEEL. A fight "off." That's no use. . . .
Go on.

CLAY. At the right is a screen.

STEEL. Ah, a screen scene . . . that always goes.

VIGO. It depends entirely on the handling.

STEEL [*turning*]. Eh?

VIGO. That is my opinion. . . . My point is that the public will take whatever is good of its kind——

STEEL. You're a critic. . . . You're one of those damn critics.

VIGO [*quietly*]. I am not a critic, and I am not going to be bullied. I have written a play and I am going to read it to you.

STEEL. He's insulted me . . . in my own theatre. . . .

BATEMAN. Steady, sir, steady.

VIGO. I have written a play and I am going to read it to you. It is your business to listen. If you are running this theatre as a private lark . . . well and good ; I'll go. But if you are running it in the service of the public, then it is your business to listen to me.

STEEL. I'm a servant of the public, I am . . . I've always been a servant of the public . . . I've been thirty years in management, and I don't need to be taught my business.

VIGO. How much are you losing a week ?

STEEL [*angrily*]. I'll . . . I'll . . .

VIGO. What will you do ?

STEEL. I'll have you put into the street . . . into the street . . . by the fireman . . .

BATEMAN. I think the gentleman's connected with the Press, sir.

STEEL. Why didn't you say so before ? . . . Of course I'll listen to your play . . . if you'll only wait. . . . Clay first, you know . . . he won the toss. . . . You lost your temper, you know. . . .

VIGO. I did not. . . . I'll wait.

STEEL. Now, Clay.

[*He returns to his make-up.*]

CLAY [*reads*]. "Act III. The scene is the vestibule . . ."

[*The telephone rings. BATEMAN goes to it.*]

BATEMAN. Yes. . . . It's Mr. Bauerkeller, of the *Reflector*, sir.

STEEL. I'll see him.

CLAY [*reads*]. "*Marion* : See, the sky and the gentian are both blue. The gentian outshines the sky but I see in both only the

blue eyes of my little Willie lying there on the hillside . . .”

STEEL. I say, you know, that's beautiful . . . beautiful. . . . That's poetry, Clay, that is . . . poetry. . . . But I wouldn't have too much of it, you know . . . just a touch here and there.

CLAY [*reads*]. “*Duval*: You know there is nothing I would not do for you, if I could once be rid of Verrinder.”

“*Marion*: Little Willie is his child.

“*Duval*: I know.”

[*A dark, neat little Hebrew enters.*

STEEL. How do you do, Mr. Bauerkeller? . . . Drink? . . . Smoke?

[BAUERKELLER *takes both from* BATEMAN.

BAUER. How's the play doing, Mr. Steel?

STEEL. Magnificent. . . . Never had such business since the *Vale of Acheron*. . . . Ah, that was a play.

BAUER. Glad of that. . . . We'll print photographs to-morrow.

STEEL. Thanks . . . thanks . . . awfully.

BAUER. What are your plans . . . Mr. Steel?

STEEL. Ah, Mr. Clay here is just reading me a play.

CLAY. Mr. *Cheeseman* Clay.

STEEL. And Mr. Vigo here . . .

VIGO. Please keep my name out of it. . . .

BAUER. Of course . . . of course.

STEEL. I have contracts with many of the leading dramatists. . . .

BAUER. Our proprietors think the Imperial sentiment wants waking up.

STEEL. It does . . . oh, it does. . . . *The*

Far Flung Empire . . . That's a title. . . . The proconsul would be a character new to the stage. . . . The strong man. . . . The governor of millions of aborigines. . . . Ah, that would be a part. . . . Scene . . . a durbar. . . . Elephants, rajahs, soldiers. . . . There is a mystery. . . . The proconsul . . .

BAUER. Ah . . . the sense of the theatre, Mr. Steel!

STEEL. That's it . . . the sense of the theatre. . . . Of course, you'd advertise such a play?

BAUER. I can't promise anything. I only say that there is such a feeling in the air. An Imperial play . . .

STEEL. This play we are doing now will keep us going for some months. . . . Just a popular thing, you know. How do you like my costume?

BAUER. Magnificent.

STEEL. It cost five hundred pounds. Just a moment. . . . [*He rapidly finishes his make-up.*]

BAUER. Your views on the British drama just the same?

[STEEL *dons his stock, coat, and waistcoat.*]

STEEL. I may say that I have never known a time when the theatre was so prosperous or in such a state of healthy activity. . . . I have spent ten thousand pounds on this production. On a play which I have in view to succeed it, an Imperial play, I shall spend twenty thousand, if not more. I shall spare nothing. I have re-engaged Miss Britannia Metal for the unusual part of a Rajah's chief wife who has escaped from the cruel confinement of the harem and placed herself under the protection of the pro-

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consul's military attaché, a married man. . . .
The proconsul is a bachelor. . . . It would not
be fair to the author to say more.

BAUER. Thank you, Mr. Steel.

[STEEL *does his wig.*

CALL-BOY [*outside*]. Five minutes.

STEEL. Good heavens, the clocks are slow !

BAUER. Good night, Mr. Steel.

[*He turns to go.*

CLAY. Don't forget . . . Mr. *Cheeseman* Clay.

STEEL. Now, Clay, for your third act. . . .
Pity you missed the first two, Mr. Bauerkeller
. . . splendid stuff.

VIGO. I'm going to read my play.

STEEL. I am always willing to hear plays.

[BAUERKELLER *has been held up at the door
by the entry of a Georgian lady in a magni-
ficent costume.*

BRITANNIA. Are you the *Sun* ?

BAUER. No, Miss Metal . . . the *Reflector*.

BRITANNIA. It doesn't matter . . . I want to
talk to you about the *fête-champêtre* organised
by the Duchess of Bucketshire. . . . I am to
wear a costume of the—but come outside . . .
It is a secret. [She drags BAUERKELLER out.

VIGO. I am going to read my play to you.

CLAY. I am prepared to give you the option
on mine.

STEEL. You see, gentlemen, I am always ready
to hear plays. It is part of my business to hear
plays. But, as you have just heard, I am con-
templating a really big production, the Imperial
character of which is bound to appeal——

VIGO. You are going to hear my play.

STEEL. Mr. Clay first. . . . Now, Mr. Clay . . .

VIGO. I am going to read my play to you. It is called *Discipline*.

STEEL. If it's about prisons I don't want to hear it. . . . Prisons have been overdone.

VIGO. My play is called *Discipline*. It is in four acts, and each act is built so as to bear the weight of the next.

STEEL. Suppose you send it to me. I'll read it.

VIGO. You wouldn't understand it.

STEEL. Go on, Mr. Clay. . . .

CLAY [reads]. "*Marion*: But once Sir Derek was my husband——"

VIGO [reads]. "*Claude*: Are we to stand this much longer, sir?"

CLAY [reads]. "*Duval*: It is impossible for a wife to wrong such a husband."

VIGO [reads]. "*Bassett*: In such cases it is always wise to wait until your rascal has overreached himself."

CLAY [reads]. "*Marion*: Blue sky, blue gentian, but nothing is so blue as Willie's eyes, and they are Derek's eyes."

VIGO [reads]. "*Claude*: Business is business."

CLAY [reads]. "*Duval*: Those eyes shall soon be closed."

VIGO [reads]. "*Bassett*: No man should sacrifice his business to his vanity."

[STEEL rises and goes to the cheval-glass and admires himself. The two authors follow him.

CLAY [reads]. "*Marion*: Heart's misery . . . heart's misery!"

[The Georgian lady re-enters.

BRITANNIA. Look here, Jack. I'm not going to stand these rotten houses much longer. . . . You print my name larger. . . . They don't know I'm here. I shouldn't wonder if they're all going to the Haymarket thinking I'm still there. . . . They do know what they're about there . . . gave me letters a foot and a half high.

[STEEL *strikes an attitude.*

VIGO [*reads*]. "*Bassett*: The whole business of advertisement is to be sure of the quality of your goods."

STEEL. Miss Metal, you have such beautiful eyes, you could outstare the angels.

BRITANNIA. That's all right for the girls, Jack . . . but it doesn't wash with me. . . . You print my name larger. Either you bill me properly or I leave the theatre.

CLAY [*reads sepulchrally*]. "*Marion*: Heart's misery! Death must be sweeter than such poisoned love!"

STEEL. "Poisoned love" is good, Mr. Clay. . . . But pray sit down.

VIGO [*reads*]. "*Claude*: You'll nail him down in time."

STEEL. Please sit down, Mr. Vigo. . . . These gentlemen are reading me a play they have written. . . . They are collaborators.

BRITANNIA. Charming. . . . Anything for me?

[*She sweeps a curtsey.*

VIGO. I am not in collaboration with Mr. Clay or anybody else. I have written a play and I am going to read it to Mr. Steel. There are no parts in it for anybody. The actors are to ac

my play ; my play is not to serve as an advertising medium for the actors.

BRITANNIA. Don't you make any mistake, young man. You're not going to make Jack Steel produce you that way . . . is he, Jack ?

STEEL. Admirable Miss Metal, I'll have new bills out to-morrow.

CLAY [*reads*]. "*Marion* : If one could blot out memory."

STEEL. Miss Metal, would you mind rehearsing the scene where Rupert rides from Belmont. . . . It must go better to-night.

[*The two Georgian figures bow and curtsy.*]

BRITANNIA. "I am vastly obliged, sir, but I cannot gainsay my heart, and that cries aloud, 'The King ! The King !' "

STEEL. "And mine would fain cry with it 'The King ! The King !'—but oh, our two hearts cry aloud for different kings."

BRITANNIA. "My king before my love. . . ."

STEEL. "My love before my king. . . ."

BRITANNIA. "Why then, sir, my king's a better king than yours."

STEEL. "My king's in power and master of us all."

VIGO. That's blank verse.

CLAY [*reads*]. "*Marion* : Here where I thought I could be free, I am most haunted."

BRITANNIA. "Your king's in power. . . . But how long ? "

STEEL. "Lovely rebel. . . . But my king is here."

BRITANNIA. "How say you ? Here ? But how ? Here ? . . . But hark. . . . The horn !

Rupert's horn from Belmont! Victory! The King! The King!"

STEEL. "God save his Majesty!"

BRITANNIA. "Which king?"

STEEL. "Mine! I am the king!" That's much better. They won't laugh to-night.

BRITANNIA. "Oh! . . . Your Majesty!"

[STEEL holds out a royal hand. She takes it. The call-boy bangs on the door.

CALL-BOY. Call. . . . Call! Curtain! Curtain!

BRITANNIA. "I am your Majesty's most rebellious subject."

STEEL. You shall be billed to-morrow in letters two feet high.

BRITANNIA. Thank you, Jack.

[STEEL lifts her hand high in the air with his most royal manner and escorts her to the door. She goes out. He turns.

STEEL. Good evening, gentlemen.

[He goes out. VIGO and CLAY are left.

CLAY [wrapping up his play]. I knew it wasn't any good. They never listen when they've got a failure. Good night.

[He goes. BATEMAN is busy at the dressing-table. VIGO sits grimly.

BATEMAN. Going to stay, sir?

VIGO. I'm going to read my play to him.

BATEMAN. There isn't a dog's chance, sir.

VIGO. I'll take it.

[BATEMAN goes up into the little room. VIGO is left waiting.

CURTAIN

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